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In Defense of Our Relatives

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Abstract

Groups often act against threats to their kin, but what if one group denies the very existence of another's relatives? Among the people of Oceti Sakowin, what it means to care for 'relatives' starkly contrasts conventional non-Native ways of reckoning with water, land, and other beings. If, according to an indigenous view, sacred places are relatives, then words like 'emergency' or 'crisis' are apt to describe Indigenous people's feelings about clashes such as what recently occurred around Standing Rock, North Dakota. There, the matter of what counts as kin was a central ingredient to collective protests that, even if labeled as a one-off defeat, may empower those who have been historically disempowered. Led by a well-coordinated and social media-savvy Indigenous youth movement, the struggle to protect a relative—a river, in this case—may indicate a renewed sense of efficacy among Indigenous peoples, perhaps especially among those who had not previously identified as activists.

Keywords: Sacred space; Social media; Protest camps; Standing Rock Indian Reservation (N.D. and S.D.); Dakota Indians, Lakota Indians; Youth protest movements

Introduction

The Missouri is the longest river system on Turtle Island and the fourth-longest in the world. Rising in the Rocky Mountains of western Montana, the Missouri flows east and south for 2,341 miles (~3,767 km) before entering the Mississippi River just north of St. Louis, Missouri. The semi-arid watershed that makes up the Missouri ecosystem covers more than 500,000 square miles (~1,294,994 km²). According to Cody Knudson, a contributor to the *Encyclopedia of the Great Plains*, "The river drains roughly one-sixth of the United States, including portions of ten states, the homelands of twenty-eight Native American tribes, and a small portion of two Canadian provinces."¹ Historically, the river channel meandered freely across its flood plain moving immense amounts of sediment in the process. This sediment transport kept the basin's soil rich and supported a thriving ecological community. But by the late twentieth century, the vastness of this ecosystem, its vibrant other-than-human communities, and its wild grandeur was irrevocably diminished by dams, and then again by oil production and transport.

Today, the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) cuts across the same northern plain that the Missouri river does. In fact, the two have become indelibly linked. In 2014, however, a legal

¹ Cody L. Knutson 'PICK-SLOAN PLAN'. *Encyclopedia of the Great Plains* ed. David J. Wishart. <http://plainshumanities.unl.edu/encyclopedia/doc/egp.wat.019>. Accessed 21 Sept 2017.

battle was waged to obviate this linkage. Two years later, the battle mutated into a physical defense of the river and Indigenous lands and sacred sites. That this battle was not successful in stopping the construction of the pipeline is less important than understanding what happened in defense of our relatives and embracing what we have learned as Indigenous people.

Damming of the Missouri

During the Great Depression, unsustainable agricultural practices on the Great Plains and the prolonged drought of the 1930s, which caused the Dust Bowl, focused the attention of the US Department of the Interior's Bureau of Reclamation on the Missouri River basin and advanced the development of large scale water storage and irrigation projects. It was the three historic floods of 1943, however, that brought the Flood Control Act and the Pick-Sloan Plan to the banks of the Missouri. To curtail the damage wrought by severe drought-flood oscillations and to support growing non-Indigenous human populations, the United States turned its attention to dam building with limited scientific or historical hydrologic and geomorphologic knowledge. The drafters of the Pick-Sloan legislation² posited that management of the river would decrease damage caused by future flooding events, and 'benefit the region's economy through increased irrigation and hydropower production, enhanced navigation, and job opportunities for veterans returning from World War II.'³ To this end, seven large dams were built along the main stem of the river, six pursuant to the Pick-Sloan legislation. Once functioning, the dams caused massive flooding resulting in the formation of six lakes: Fort Peck Lake, Lake Oahe, Lake Sakakawea, Lewis and Clark Lake, Lake Francis Case and Lake Sharpe.

Setting the Flood Control Act and the Pick-Sloan Plan into action was a violation of the judicially crafted Winters Doctrine of 1908. This doctrine clarifies the water rights of Indigenous peoples who reside on reservations. It acknowledges the superior right of Indigenous people to maintain jurisdiction and control of waterways even within a diminished land base as long as the rivers are traveling through original territories. It is important to consider that policy does not work unless there is force behind it. Most think of the United States as an acting force that is facilitated by state police and military, but the same thinking does not apprehend the state as an acting force by way of large scale irrigation projects. Most are simply unable, or unwilling, to acknowledge the amount of calculation that was involved in the planning of the Flood Control Act and the Pick-Sloan Plan. Three government agencies worked in tandem to eliminate Indigenous people from the river basin. This may not be as discernably violent as the use of nineteenth-century Gatling guns, but this legislation achieves much the same thing: Indigenous elimination by paper bills, acts, plans, laws and dams.⁴ Patrick Wolfe correctly recognizes that this long logic of elimination is another part of a colonial mentality that is an enormous sociological structure and not simply an event.⁵ In direct violation of the Winters Doctrine, treaties and the US Constitution, the Pick-Sloan Plan unilaterally stripped Indigenous people of all jurisdiction over the water and large portions of land along the banks of the Missouri.

The Oahe Dam alone was responsible for flooding over 200,000 acres on the Standing Rock and Cheyenne River Reservations, while other main stem dams negatively impacted the

² The Pick-Sloan Missouri Basin Program was the product of the Flood Control Act of 1944, a collaborative plan of the US Army Corps of Engineers and US Bureau of Reclamation.

³ Knutson, 'PICK-SLOAN PLAN'.

⁴ Michelle Latimer. *Red Power: Standing Rock Part II*. Documentary, 2017. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt6508412/>.

⁵ Patrick Wolfe. 'Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native'. *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006/1201): 387–409.

Indigenous populations on the Fort Berthold, Crow Creek and Lower Brule Reservations.⁶ The dams and subsequent reservoirs flooded prime agricultural and grazing lands. They were also responsible for eliminating nearly ninety percent of timber resources and seventy-five percent of wildlife on the reservations,⁷ submerging sacred sites and ceremonial grounds and displacing hundreds of Indigenous families from their homes.

Presently, there are fifteen large-structure dams on the main stem of the Missouri and twenty-one on its tributaries. The total number of dams and reservoirs in the region is estimated to be somewhere near 17,200, most of which are smaller locally maintained structures.⁸ The second portion of the plan, the 1945 Rivers and Harbors Act authorized by Congress, paved the way for the Missouri River Bank Stabilization and Navigation Project. This resulted in the channelization of the Missouri downstream of Sioux City, Iowa. Finally, in 1972, the Bureau of Reclamation authorized the building of an additional six dams in Nebraska. Upon completion of these projects in 1994, the Missouri River and its tributaries had become the backbone of the largest engineering and infrastructure development endeavor in the United States to date. Over the last fifty years the river has given much, but in 2014 it was called upon again—this time by a deadlier foe.

The Dakota Access Pipeline

The Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) is a project of Dakota Access, LLC, a subsidiary of Energy Transfer Partners (ETP). It is a subsurface pipeline that begins in the Bakken shale oil fields⁹ of northwest North Dakota. From this point, it travels southeast through South Dakota and Iowa, finding its terminus in an oil depot in Patoka, Illinois. In total, it traverses 1,172 miles (1,886 km) of plains land, crossing under the Missouri once in south central North Dakota. Seven counties in this state alone bear the weight of 346 miles (557 km) of both gathering and transmission pipelines, while South Dakota houses 274 miles of pipeline and an electric pump station. Once in use, the pipeline is slated to transfer 470,000 barrels of crude oil per day (75,000 m³/d)¹⁰ to the refinery in Illinois where it will be sold to international corporations.

The project was officially introduced to the public in June 2014 and faced a two-year court battle waged by Indigenous peoples from the affected states, conservation groups, and environmentalists. The arguments against DAPL are based on concerns pertaining to environmental impact, Indigenous sacred site destruction, unceded land seizures and the danger versus benefit of eminent domain land seizures. In these court proceedings, ETP claimed that the transfer of crude via pipeline is safer and less expensive than transport by rail or road. This claim is quantitatively difficult to prove, however, when considering human and environmental safety. Statistics have shown rail transport to be more flexible and adaptable than pipeline

⁶ Trymaine Lee, 'Geography of Poverty Northwest', *No Man's Land: The Last Tribes of the Plains. As Industry Closes in, Native Americans Fight for Dignity and Natural Resources*, accessed September 21, 2017, <http://www.msnbc.com/interactives/geography-of-poverty/nw.html>.

⁷ Bernard D. Shanks. 'The American Indian and Missouri River Water Developments'. *JAWRA: Journal of the American Water Resources Association*, 1 June 1974. 573–79. doi:10.1111/j.1752-1688.1974.tb00598.x.

⁸ US Geological Survey. 'The Missouri River Basin in North Dakota'. Water Resources of North Dakota. <https://nd.water.usgs.gov/missouririver/index.html>. Page last modified 4 Jan 2017. Accessed 21 Sept 2017.

⁹ The Bakken Formation covers approximately 200,000 subsurface square miles (520,000 km²) and underlies northeastern Montana, northwestern North Dakota, Manitoba and Saskatchewan Canada. It was discovered in 1952.

¹⁰ Jack Healy. 'North Dakota Oil Pipeline Battle: Who's Fighting and Why'. The New York Times, 26 August 2016. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/02/us/north-dakota-oil-pipeline-battle-whos-fighting-and-why.html>.

transport, with significantly less spill volume,¹¹ and rail transport infrastructure for Bakken is already in place. More importantly, studies have shown that a decline in Bakken heavy oil production took place as early as January 2015. Even as extant data shows an immediate increase in well production, actual well performance shows that the overall reservoir energy has been depleted by gas expansion. This will accelerate the decline of production in the coming years.¹² Yet the argument implicit in these findings is not that oil-by-rail shipment of Bakken crude is a favorable alternative to pipeline transportation. Conservative estimates show that at least 10,200,000 gallons of crude oil were spilled in the United States between 2000 and 2017. Clearly, both modes of transport are unacceptable, as is a 3.8 billion-dollar investment in a waning oil field and industry. Despite claims made by all parties, there is no counterargument to the reality that pipelines will fail and ecological disasters will inevitably follow.

The truth of this statement was acknowledged when the original pipeline corridor, north of Bismarck, North Dakota, was rejected by the US Army Corps of Engineers, citing the threat to drinking water and farmland contamination in a largely white municipality. The current route travels through the unceded territory of the Sioux Nation recognized in the 1868 Treaty of Fort Laramie, then passes under three rivers and Lake Oahe (all tributaries of the Missouri River System) a half-mile north of the Standing Rock Reservation border. On approving this southern route, the US Army Corps of Engineers failed to meet the minimum requirements of its federal mandate for meaningful consultation with the Standing Rock Tribe. Certainly, the people of Bismarck should not be subjected to the contamination of their environment by an oil spill. It is clear, however, that the Yanktonai Dakota, the Hunkpapa and Sicasu Lakota are being forced at gunpoint to accept ecological risks that northern white communities refused to accept.

Legal Fight

The Standing Rock Tribe, Cheyenne River Tribe and Meskwaki Tribe (to name a few of the indigenous nations seeking to stop DAPL) began legal proceedings against Energy Transfer Partners as early as 2014. Standing Rock Tribal Chairman Dave Archambault II stated that DAPL construction threatens the 'tribe's way of life, [its] water, people and land' and indicated the 'tribe's opposition to any pipeline within the treaty boundaries encompassing North Dakota, Montana, Wyoming, and South Dakota.'¹³ Of particular concern was the impact that the pipeline would have on important landscapes and sacred sites. This was the subject of a lawsuit filed by Standing Rock Tribe against the US Army Corps of Engineers for violating the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act and the National Historic Preservation Act, by which the Tribe sought injunctive relief from construction. In 2016, finding little legal support within the United States to halt DAPL construction, Archambault addressed the UN Human Rights Council and the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Rights, citing the 1851 Treaty of Traverse des Sioux and 1868 Treaty of Fort Laramie, ratified by the US government and acknowledging the sovereignty of the Sioux Nation. He argued that by failing to consult the Tribe about the proposed DAPL route, the United States failed to fulfill its legal obligations to the Tribe in recognition of its sovereign rights under the terms of these

¹¹ John Frittelli, Anthony Andrews, Paul W. Parfomak, Robert Pirog, Jonathan L. Ramseur and Michael Ratner. 'US Rail Transportation of Crude Oil: Background and Issues for Congress'. Report. Congressional Research Service. Archived from the original (PDF) on 28 March 2014 by Federation of American Scientists. <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R43390.pdf>. Accessed 25 Sept 2017.

¹² Art Berman. 'The Beginning Of The End For The Bakken Shale Play'. *Forbes*, 1 March 2017. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/arthurberman/2017/03/01/the-beginning-of-the-end-for-the-bakken-shale-play/>. Accessed 23 Sept 2017.

¹³ Standing Rock Sioux Tribe. *Sept 30th DAPL Meeting with SRST*. Audio recording, 30 Sept 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZlwdtnZXmtY>.

treaties. Further, Section 106 of the Treaty of Fort Laramie specifically names the area in question 'ancestral lands that are treated territory'.

Because of this, the land cannot be legally expropriated by a state or the federal government through eminent domain powers, as treated land is different from privately held property. In response to these claims, the UN agreed that 'the tribe was denied access to information and excluded from consultations at the planning stage of the project and environmental assessments failed to disclose the presence and proximity of the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation'. The UN statement continued with an eye toward the rights of the water protectors: 'The U.S. authorities should fully protect and facilitate the right to freedom of peaceful assembly of Indigenous peoples, which plays a key role in their ability to claim other rights'.¹⁴

Volumes could be filled with accounts of the legal battles waged by Indigenous groups, and the discussion of these issues here must be somewhat truncated. Still, it is imperative to recognize that our fight to protect our relatives began long before the first shovel for DAPL construction sank into the ground. The two and a half years of court battles waged by Indigenous and environmental groups irrefutably discounts the claim made by Energy Transfer Partners that if the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe had voiced their objections to the project earlier, they would have changed the route: they did change the route. ETP and USACE chose to run the pipeline through sacred landscapes and to desecrate sacred sites in spaces the US has legally deemed national sacrifice areas, or indigenous territories of cultural and religious significance. Unfortunately, this is not an isolated event. Dispossession, land theft, the creation of reservations, the illegal seizure of the Black Hills, flooding of homelands and contamination of Mníšoše¹⁵ all demonstrate a continued disregard for Indigenous culture, traditions and knowledges. These actions exemplify a widespread effort to limit our ability to fulfill our responsibilities to our relations. After two years of court battles, in March 2016, pipeline construction began. But before we talk about the camps and the resistance, we must consider Indigenous affection for the land and what we mean when we talk about our relatives.

Our History

This story is not an aggrandizement of US technological advancement or superiority. It is a story about relatives and the Indigenous obligation to protect our sacred and reciprocal relationships with them. These relationships are not simply metaphorical, they are substantive and based on interactions with a plethora of other-than-human beings cultivated in place, with the earth and the larger cosmos over the long history of Indigenous existence. All things are perceived as possessing a unique energy, intelligence and innovatory method which includes other-than-human beings, plants and microorganisms, as well as streams, rocks, mountains and all other places. This way of being in the world is unilaterally rejected by the western world as fallacious superstition. Anthropologists call it animism; a term largely misinterpreted through ethnocentric notions of supremacy.

For most Indigenous peoples, this relationship with all beings, places and the universe begins at birth and continues until death—and beyond. At birth, humans come into being 'through the elegant cycles of metamorphosis, transformation, and regeneration that form the

¹⁴ Andrea Germanos. 'UN Experts to United States: Stop DAPL Now'. *Common Dreams*, 25 Sept 2016. <https://www.commondreams.org/news/2016/09/25/un-experts-united-states-stop-dapl-now>.

¹⁵ This is the Lakota name for the Missouri River. On 4 April 2017, less than one month after the first crude was delivered through the pipeline and two months before it was commercially operational, 84 gallons of oil leaked from the pipeline.

basis for all life on earth.¹⁶ At death, through the process of decomposition, all organic substances are broken down into the simple elemental matter of earth. This nutrient cycle is not only essential for the return of finite matter to the biosphere, it also marks the biological transformation of relatives and ancestors into place ecosystems and landscapes. Death is understood as the process through which the spirit (energy) is not lost to creation, it simply changes form. Through the processes of these biogeochemical cycles our ancestors become the wind, water, fire, soil and clouds, and are taken in by all other-than-human beings of our places. These entities, then, by scientific definition and metaphysical understanding, are truly our relatives. As Indigenous people, we do not see ourselves as standing outside of nature, but as an integral part of it and 'as we experience the world, so we are experienced by it'.¹⁷ These relationships are innate to both the formation of larger collective spheres of Indigenous language, culture, science and philosophies as well as individual acts of reciprocity to the land and all other relatives. For this reason, these relationships help to define what it is to be Indigenous.¹⁸

I will focus on the land and water near Standing Rock Reservation, which straddles the border in the area that is now known as central North and South Dakota. The population here is a mix of Hunkpapa Lakota, Sihasapa Lakota and Yanktonai Dakota—a part of the Oceti Sakowin. This reservation is the sixth-largest (although greatly diminished in size) within the borders of the United States. It currently covers 3,572 square miles (~9,251 km²) with a population of over 8,000 people. Here, and for approximately 15 million non-Indigenous people living downstream along the Missouri, mní wičóŋi (water is life).

In acknowledging the above, one can begin to understand the urgent and extreme gravity of the defense of our relatives near Standing Rock. At the site of the first Dakota Access Pipeline resistance camp, the confluence of the Cannonball and Missouri Rivers, there once was a whirlpool that created large spherical sandstone formations. The river's true name is Inyan Wakangapi Wakpa, the River that Makes Sacred Stones, and this is why the first resistance camp was named Sacred Stone Camp.¹⁹ Stones are no longer forged at this meeting place, since the US Army Corps of Engineers dredged the mouth of the Cannonball and flooded the area in the late 1950s while completing the Oahe Dam downstream. When the floods came, they desecrated important spiritual sites. From Sacred Stone Camp, if you look east to where USACE drilled under the river, you can see the remains of the burial grounds, ancient Sundance grounds and old village sites that the dams destroyed. If you look with your memory, you can see the place that made the sacred stones. The dredging of Cannonball River happened before I was born, but I know the stories of loss, and I feel the pain of knowing that the Army Corps killed a part of our river and violated our relatives. Unfortunately, this is not the last of our sacred places that is in danger: there are 380 archeological sites along the length of the DAPL that face destruction. Twenty-six of these sites are here at the confluence of the Cannonball and Missouri rivers. Illegal land seizure, mining, oil production and transport, fracking, seismic blasting and sacred site destruction demonstrate a continuance of acts by the US government bent on the erasure of our sacred places and cultural sites, the ultimate objective of which is the obliteration of Indigenous existence in this place. In defending our relatives, we are acting in a centered, prayerful way and refusing this erasure.

¹⁶ Gregory Cajete. *Native Science: Natural Laws of Interdependence*. Santa Fe, NM: Clear Light Publishers, 2000. 21.

¹⁷ Ibid. 20

¹⁸ It is important to understand that how these relationships are cultivated in Indigenous societies are similar, but the specific relationships and responsibilities they require are as numerous as the Nations of Peoples.

¹⁹ LaDonna Brave Bull Allard. 'Why the Founder of Standing Rock Sioux Camp Can't Forget the Whitestone Massacre'. YES! Magazine, 3 Sept 2016. <http://www.yesmagazine.org/people-power/why-the-founder-of-standing-rock-sioux-camp-cant-forget-the-whitestone-massacre-20160903>. Accessed 27 Sept 2017.

Youth Movement

While it is not widely acknowledged, the defense of our relatives near Standing Rock began as an Indigenous youth movement. In April 2016, after receiving the approval of the Standing Rock Tribal Council, a group of Indigenous youth set up a small camp on the extreme north end of Standing Rock Reservation in a protected ravine near the planned Dakota Access route. Initially, the camp was meant to provide a safe place of prayer for youth.²⁰ This was to be a place to live in ceremony and to teach children how to navigate everyday difficulties through activism. Members of the One Mind Youth Movement hoped they could pass on what they had been taught by activists from the Keystone XL protests, which contested the 2011 plan for a pipeline from Hardisty, Alberta, to refineries in Texas. During that campaign, groups like the Indigenous Environmental Network had instructed surrounding communities about civil disobedience and trained One Mind members as organizers. After weeks at the camp with little support, the youth decided that some sort of action was needed to stimulate interest in their project. A young woman, Bobby Jean Three Legs from Standing Rock, proposed a 500-mile run to Omaha to present a letter to the Army Corps of Engineers, requesting that they deny permissions for DAPL to cross the Missouri.

Even though the Army Corps of Engineers agreed to meet with members of the tribe, the youth decided to go ahead with the run in the hope that it would stimulate support from the tribal government and bring together youth from all Sioux reservations. After delivering the message in Omaha without much effect, the runners decided that they would take the request to the Washington, DC headquarters of the Army Corps of Engineers. On 15 July 2016, thirty runners set off from Sacred Stone on a 2,000-mile run, with more participants joining as the runners moved along the route. Despite the USACE granting the Dakota Access pipeline easement on 29 July, the runners continued to Washington, DC, while the focus returned to Sacred Stone camp. A massive nation-wide social media push began, calling all Indigenous Nations and urban communities to mirror the example of the youth movement and come to Sacred Stone. This call was heard. What happened next was nothing short of historic.

By late August, the camp population had grown from a few dozen to thousands. Social media coverage of the youth run had accomplished what it set out to do. Dallas Goldtooth—an organizer for the Indigenous Environmental Network's "Keep It In the Ground" initiative, and one of the on-the-ground journalists at the #NoDAPL resistance camps—said that these actions 'forced their [Elders'] support by transforming the Dakota Access pipeline from a regional Lakota issue into an international one.'²¹ While the camp expanded, traditional leadership and elders began to take more visible roles in the movement. Soon after, a Council Lodge was erected, establishing a place where head men, medicine men, youth and other organizers collaborated to restore Indigenous self-governance. This was not an insignificant event. It signified a reawakening of the political will of the people in a structure that had only been seen by the youth in their collective memory. In form, theory and praxis, the movement had come full circle: embracing a holistic Indigenous approach in defense of our relatives.

Talk in the camp had begun. Prayer, resistance and traditional leadership were soon linked to prophecy, the weight of which was borne by Indigenous youth. While some discredit the existence of the Black Snake Prophecy prior to the 2014 Keystone XL protests, others link

²⁰ The camp was meant to provide a place away from family and other stresses of their environment, after a 2015 wave of Indigenous youth suicides.

²¹ Saul Elbein. 'The Youth Group That Launched a Movement at Standing Rock'. *The New York Times Magazine*, 31 Jan 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/31/magazine/the-youth-group-that-launched-a-movement-at-standing-rock.html>.

its origin to a vision of the Ogata Lakota medicine man, Black Elk. It is said he dreamt of a black snake crossing a river. If this came to fruition, he prophesied that it would signal the beginning of the end of the world, but if this was prevented by the Seventh Generation—Indigenous populations living after seven generations of contact with Europeans—a new age of balance and peace would result. It is not for me to say which perspective on the prophecy is true. For this discussion, it does not really matter: it was a part of the conversation on the ground in the camps and the weight of delivering a positive outcome was felt by the youth.

By early September, the gravity of the movement was officially recognized by the elders through ceremony. Chief Arvol Looking Horse, a beloved spiritual leader of the Lakota, presented the youth with a *čhanunpa*, a ceremonial pipe symbolizing the unification of all our relations. In the same ceremony, the youth were recognized as warriors for the people. The youth may have been unprepared for the leadership positions that they had assumed, and the process of managing this weight in the maelstrom of violent conflict precipitated many complicated realities. Participation aided the release of trauma caused by colonization, in a space that reflected both colonial brutality and the beauty of living in ceremony. Acting as water protectors from an Indigenous place of non-violent, prayerful action aided youth in developing tangible ways to combat present and historical trauma. Their resistance gave the youth a vital role in their nations, a responsibility to forgive and a mandate to act for the betterment of coming generations. Finally, witnessing a gathering of Nations on this scale conveyed an immense amount of pride and power that was felt by all on the ground.

As the weeks passed and the camps continued to grow, the youth remained at the front lines of the peaceful actions, taking risks and bringing more to the cause through example. On 4 December 2016, the Department of the Army unexpectedly announced that they would deny the easement for the Dakota Access route. Disbelief, amazement and the release of tension was palpable. In a video interview from the camps that flooded social media, we watch as Naomi Klein tells Tokata Iron Eyes, a 13-year-old water protector, about the decision. Upon hearing the news, Iron Eyes's surprise is clear. First she says, 'What?' Then, while crying, she exposes a huge white-toothed grin. For a moment she is silent, then the camp explodes into singing as the news spreads and she gasps. In a tiny, powerful voice Iron Eyes says, 'I feel like I have my future back!' hugging Klein before nearly collapsing on the ground. This reprieve did not last for long, but it was needed if only for a moment.

The Camps

The idea of the camps and what they became are different stories to be told. In the beginning, five months before the early September influx, the idea was simple and powerful: to create a safe place for healing, learning and resisting in a prayerful way. None of the original organizers could have imagined what or how large the movement would become. Social media brought our fight to the doorstep of the world and people responded. Indigenous nations from around the globe entered through the camp gates in culturally significant ways, demonstrating their resolve and appreciation of the gravity of the situation. Other non-Indigenous people showed up too. Some were long-time allies of the people that had stood with us before. Some were not entirely sure of why they were there, but recognized a need to stand against something—inequality, genocide, big oil, corporatocracy, the environment, or global warming—in a rapidly approaching Trump era.

Once direct action had begun, simply getting to the camp gate always brought some amount of relief. My first time through the gate brought a smile and sense of pride. The car was inspected, the driver and I were asked about drugs, alcohol and weapons, and then welcomed home. This struck an interesting chord in me. Being Sihasapa-German, I know that

I am a part of the Oceti Sakowin and that this place is part of our ancestral lands, but it is a place I did not know. My realization was that the reservation system was meant not only to confine, but to cleave the Nation's unity and break extended familial ties. I realized that I was home again for the first time and wondered how many others felt the same way.

The massive and rapid increase in population brought with it unexpected logistical issues. Food, water, clothing, tents, portable toilets, wood and other essentials were sometimes in short supply, and the Medic and Healer's Council²² was always on the move, providing aid to the wounded and ill. Occupying the camp was physically difficult. This was particularly true as the days got shorter, the wind grew stronger, the temperature dropped and violence increased. There was not a lot of rest. With cooking, cleaning, attending ceremony, daily direct-action training and participation in direct actions, most were happy to find a pillow when the moment presented itself. Still, the general feeling was one of willingness to play whatever part was needed. The functioning of the camp, however, was not always idyllic. There was some contention between headmen, tribal leaders and traditional leaders that resulted in disharmony, as well as some violence against women and drinking. It is folly to think, even in a prayerful environment, that realities of the outside world simply vanish. The violence of years of oppression, colonization, treaty violations, forced relocation, boarding schools, incarceration and genocidal policy, has proven to transmit itself through genetic pathology and historical trauma. Despite efforts to combat these practices, some of these pathologies found their way into the camp. Though this was a focus of embedded reporters and mainstream media, it was not the lesson that we took from our experience. Instead, we realized that we were a part of a historic gathering of the people. Nations put aside differences to unite for one cause, and we could confront violence with love and good hearts because of the strength of ceremony, for our relatives, and the coming generations.

Cyber Warfare

In the early days of the camp, cell phone and streaming issues became a bit of an uneasy joke. Certainly, the camps were in a remote area in rough terrain, but the nearly hourly airplane 'fly-bys' that coincided with loss of connectivity began to raise questions. We knew from the beginning that social media would be our only access to the outside world and our only vector for disseminating unbiased information to the mainstream media, allies and family away from camp. We also knew that, in such a remote area, social media might be our only form of protection if conflict was escalated by Energy Transfer Partners mercenaries or North Dakota Police. Therefore, access was not simply movement-aggrandizing desire, it was a vital necessity. Fortunately, Geeks Without Bounds, an accelerator for humanitarian projects and grassroots mutual aid coordinator, had heard of our plight and difficulties. They had been working with the water protectors since September when signal loss had been acknowledged as an artificial (not natural) phenomenon. They helped to increase internet access by connecting us to Standing Rock Telecom, erected the 'stick in the ground', a tower to boost the signal, and set up a large tent on 'hop hill' for journalists and activists. This area was affectionately known as 'Facebook Hill' and became the main social media hub for the camps. Even with these heroic efforts, communication was sometimes sporadic, particularly during the two known media blackouts that were issued by North Dakota Governor Jack Dalrymple.

We now know that the methods of digital espionage used against those at the camps and our social media allies is normally reserved for use by the US upon external states thought to present a security risk to the nation. Some of the methods of digital attack cannot be proven, but the 'top suspects include a collusion between Morton County Sheriff's Department, Energy

²² This council consisted of general medical doctors, healers, mental health professionals and chiropractors.

Transfer Partners' security and intelligence contractor TigerSwan,²³ the National Guard, and/or the North Dakota Police.²⁴ However, 'legal observers are documenting and investigating the real threats that come from digital surveillance and communication interference',²⁵ mass data seizure and electronic bugs.

It is not difficult to understand why such attention was paid by the opposition to blocking our contact with the outside world. Authoritarian systems of control are set in place to establish a recognized enemy other and predicate mainstream reactions to that other.²⁶ The tendency of Western colonial states is to treat the whole of world history as if it could be viewed as a kind of Western super-subject. Western historicizing and disciplinary rigor either takes away or, in the postcolonial period, restores history to people and cultures 'without' history. To take away the voices of cultures that seek to complicate this narrative is imperative to the creation of an unreal other.²⁷ It also nullifies the claim to humanity of all groups defined as 'other', making these groups vulnerable to any action taken by the colonial apparatus. At the camps, digital blackouts were used for this very purpose. That is, the blackout afforded the opposition an opportunity to create a partisan narrative that condoned any violent action taken against the water protectors.

Digital and connectivity sabotage were not the only methods employed to discredit the movement. The early days of December 2016 brought hope and a bit of fear. Those in the camps and the opposition knew that military veterans would be coming to join the water protectors at Standing Rock on 4 December and the opposition was gearing up to incite a conflict. Creating public tension was imperative for mainstream support of this clash. To this end, the Federal Aviation Administration set in place a 'no-fly zone' over North Dakota and Attorney General Lynch released a public statement on behalf of the United States Department of Justice. Herein, she painted a picture of unlawful behavior and placed blame for all violent action squarely on the water protectors despite our unarmed defense of our relatives. While the video was politically correct, she set a clear tone that condoned all violent action taken by the Morton County Police, DAPL private security/TigerSwan, mercenaries and the National Guard. All of this transpired as nearly daily direct action took place.

Physical Violence

It is understandable, although unfortunate, that people identify with the idea of hate. In the US, it is regrettable that hate is so commonly focused on people of color. Where present, the generation of hatred should be at least tangentially related to a qualitative measurement, established through experience of or interactions with the focus of one's ire. This was not the case with the security forces we faced. Most had never met, had a discussion with or interacted in any way with an Indigenous person. It is probable, then, that this hatred sprang from a lifetime of assimilatory education based in national narratives that work to obstruct citizens' unification through the use of erroneous stereotypes and ideology. Most often, these assumptions are about presumed deficits in social, economic, cultural and racial character. This is the space in which racism, bigotry and hatred are fomented to a particular end.

²³ Since 2014, TigerSwan has won more than thirteen contracts worth more than nine million dollars with the US Department of State, the US Department of Defense, and the Department of Homeland Security. See 'Advanced Data Search' [results filter: tigerswan]. USAspending.gov.

<https://www.usaspending.gov/Pages/AdvancedSearch.aspx?k=tigerswan>. Accessed 29 Sept 2017.

²⁴ C.S. Hagen. 'Standing Rock's Invisible Enemy'. *High Plains Reader*, 30 Nov 2016.

<http://hpr1.com/index.php/feature/news/standing-rocks-invisible-enemy>. Accessed 29 Sept 2017.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Michel Foucault tr. Alan Sheridan. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995).

²⁷ Edward W. Said. *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

It is difficult to explain how it feels to stand in the face of extreme hate. Certainly, there is power in following the ancestors' example, knowing they made greater sacrifices. But there is also an immense sadness in knowing that you are still fighting simply to exist, over 500 years later, in different ways that are the same. I would not consider myself an activist, but I am not new to what the United States considers civil disobedience, nor am I new to the unique racism that Indigenous people face in the US. Still, I was shocked by my first direct action at the camp. The military grade turtle gear, the batons, and high-powered mace were commonplace, but the anticipatory glee that registered on almost every face of the DAPL security forces was sickening. I was prepared to be maced, bitten by attack dogs or injured in another way; but these men, it was clear, wanted more.

There are many stories that can be told here. Indigenous peoples and their allies occupied the camps for nine months. We could talk about the 2 September discovery of one of the most significant Indigenous cultural finds in the upper northwest, or the submission of documentation of the site to the Federal Court in Washington, DC to support the injunction that was already in review by that court. We could talk about DAPL personnel halting construction nearly fifteen miles to the northeast to hop-sotch bulldozers to the exact coordinates of the sacred site provided to the court. We could also talk about the same personnel plowing through the sacred site and the last two miles of the pipeline route on Sunday 4 September, before government officials had a chance to survey the area. We could talk about the horses and people who suffered from dog bites; or those who were maced, pummeled by batons or physically beaten; or the mass arrests made. But this was one of the first major conflicts and does not demonstrate the full extent to which wartime technologies were used against us. Instead we will focus on the night of the Backwater Bridge incident.

Leading up to this event, private security employees hired by Energy Transfer Partners participated in covert actions designed to pin illegal activities on water protectors. Stealing or damaging their own equipment and camp infiltration were among the actions taken to taint the integrity of the unarmed, non-violent Indigenous movement. On another occasion, an armed Energy Transfer Partner employee was instructed to break into the camp to support retaliatory DAPL security action. In an interview, Kourtnei Dockter, a former DAPL security agent, spoke specifically about two Humvee military trucks that were set ablaze by DAPL employees on the 1806 highway bridge just north of the camp.²⁸ She also recalled that on the night of the incident, just prior to a mass casualty incident, infiltrators of the camp attempted to provoke water protectors and carried out actions that supported violent suppression by security forces.²⁹

Morton County police claimed that the incident on 20 November began due to the firing of the above-mentioned vehicles by water protectors. The water cannons, they told the media, were there only to extinguish the flames. In truth, water protectors were trying to move the flaming vehicles so that access to and from the camps would be open. Given Dockter's statement above and accounts from the scene, it is more likely that the vehicles were intentionally placed and set ablaze by Energy Transfer Partner agents to block access into and escape from the camp prior to the assault. By mid-evening, more than 300 injuries had been sustained as the direct result of excessive force used by the Morton County Police. In the first seven hours of a ten-hour incident, in temperatures as low as 22°F (-6°C), the police assaulted demonstrators with water cannons causing hypothermia in almost all of nearly 400 direct-

²⁸ C.S. Hagen. 'Former DAPL Security Speaks Out, Damning TigerSwan Tactics'. *High Plains Reader*, 8 June 2017. <http://hpr1.com/index.php/feature/news/former-dapl-security-speaks-out-damning-tigerswan-tactics/>. Accessed 30 Sept 2017.

²⁹ Ibid.

action participants. According to the press release prepared by the Standing Rock Medic and Healer Council,

'Chemical weapons in the form of pepper spray and tear gas were also used extensively, requiring chemical decontamination.' Concomitantly, 'projectiles in the form of tear gas canisters, rubber bullets and concussion grenades led to numerous blunt force traumas including head wounds, lacerations, serious orthopedic injuries, eye trauma, and internal bleeding.'³⁰

The force of the violence continued unabated throughout the night and into early morning. It was at this time that Sophia Wilansky's arm was nearly blown off by an exploding concussion grenade. She sustained the injury while she was transporting water to flush pepper spray and tear gas from the eyes of the defenders. Because no one died as a direct result of this incident, the force used is considered near-lethal. But our survival, I can assure you, was an inadvertent outcome.³¹

By 4 December 2016, the US could no longer avert the bright glare of social and mainstream media attention focused on the camps due to the arrival of Veteran support. To be sure, more violence would have ensued had the Morton County Police force not been worried about injuring one of these allies. With the camp numbers swelling to somewhere between 11,000 and 15,000 people, the water protectors became a formidable foe. Despite severely inequitable armament, it should be clear that if conflict was the goal of the movement this would have been the time for action. However, no large-scale conflicts were carried out. This day also brought the news that the US Department of the Army would not grant easement for the Dakota Access Pipeline crossing of the Missouri river. Interestingly, reprieve came when mainstream media had been drawn to the camps by the presence of Veteran allies. Even as mainstream media portrayals of water protectors were egregiously erroneous, their presence alongside the Veterans stifled violent action by police that assuredly would have occurred in their absence. The world was watching. Unfortunately, these positive gains were negated on 9 February.

On 24 January 2017, in fulfillment of his campaign vow to expand fossil fuel production and roll back environmental regulations, Donald Trump signed an executive action to advance approval of the Keystone XL and Dakota Access oil pipelines. In doing so, he 'encouraged the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to abandon the review ordered under [President] Obama. On Tuesday, the Corps announced that it had done so.'³² On Wednesday, 10 November, the easement was granted and less than twenty-four hours later construction of the pipeline resumed. DAPL and Energy Transfer Partners completed drilling under Mníšoše and by April oil was flowing through the pipes.³³

On a cold day in late February, the US Army Corps of Engineers and the state of North Dakota led federal and state troops down highway 1806 to clear out the main camp. They came in with military force, slashing teepees with knives and arresting dozens of water protectors

³⁰ Standing Rock Medic and Healer Council. 'Standing Rock: Critical Injuries After Police Attack with Water Cannons, Rubber Bullets in Freezing Temps' [PR_Nov_20_English]. Google Docs. https://docs.google.com/document/d/11Aail5LREUaOwVCEMgOiQQAgeT8nF0Je1VZZO5Fkg8A/edit?usp=embed_facebook. Accessed 30 Sept 2017.

³¹ Long Range Acoustic Devices (LRAD's or sound cannons) were also used. They were designed to broadcast pain-inducing 'deterrent' tones over long distances. The LRAD corporation says that anyone within 100 meters of the device's sound path will experience extreme pain.

³² William Yardly. 'Trump Wants to Boost Defense Spending by 10% and Cut Social Spending'. *Los Angeles Times*, 24 March 2017. <http://www.latimes.com/politics/washington/la-na-essential-washington-updates-construction-resumes-on-dakota-access-1486673813-htmlstory.html>. Accessed 4 Oct 2017.

³³ By 4 April 2017 an 84-gallon leak of crude oil had already occurred.

engaged in peaceful prayer at gun point. These forces brutalized water protectors and the independent press once more, but they kept their honor and remained non-violent. In talking about this day, Floris White Bull, principle subject and co-writer of *Awake* poignantly added,

'To keep them from the disrespect of the invading officers, structures were burnt in ceremony. The physical manifestation of our dreams went into the sky in the smoke and flames. Although the camp is gone, our spirit is not broken. It is stronger than ever. It has spread throughout the land; throughout the world—like cottonwood seeds in the wind.'³⁴

Aftermath

It is difficult to believe, even as a participant, that this kind of force was brought to bear on unarmed citizens of the US acting in a constitutionally supported matter. It is more difficult to absorb the reality that many mainstream citizens supported these violent actions. In fact, across the United States, citizen assaults on individuals thought to be Indigenous increased during the attacks on the camps, as did state police assaults near reservation borders. Since the forced disbanding of the camps in early February, some things have changed but the resultant violence has not. The number of missing (or disappeared) Indigenous women and girls nationwide, and for First Nations Peoples of Canada, has reached epidemic proportions.³⁵ The youth responsible for igniting this movement have had difficulty acclimatizing to their changed reality. They had a place to be and a mission to perform. With both gone and an incipient feeling of failure in the defense of our relatives, the weight borne by these groups has become heavy indeed. Coming full circle, another wave of youth suicides has become a reality in Indian Country. As we pass the one-year anniversary of the 27 October raid of north camp, many water protectors have begun to speak about their experience of different levels of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. One can only assume that, as we approach the anniversary some of the most violent incidents of the #noDAPL resistance, more will be triggered. Certainly, we must watch our relatives closely.

Due to extended individual commitment to this resistance, many people lost their jobs. This complicates daily life and hundreds continue to fight legal battles with little access to council or funding. Red Fawn, a Lakota water protector from Pine Ridge Reservation, who is scheduled to stand trial in federal district court on 29 January 2018 on multiple charges stemming from her participation in the protests, has been imprisoned for over a year. While this and other high-profile cases like those of Chase Iron Eyes, Amy Goodman and Shailene Woodley demonstrate the continued weight born by water protectors, it does not acknowledge the expansiveness of the legal nightmare. Currently, there are more than seven hundred lower profile cases awaiting legal dispensation. As these individual cases continue, so too do the larger Federal cases brought by the Standing Rock Tribe against Dakota Access Pipeline (et. al.) and the Army Corps of Engineers.

On 14 June 2017, Federal Judge James Boasberg issued his latest ruling that the federal permits authorizing the pipeline to cross Mníšoše, issued by the Trump administration, violated the rule of law in several critical respects. Boasberg stated that while the Corps largely complied with the National Environmental Policy Act there were substantial exceptions. In the decision, the 'judge cited the Corps' study of "the impacts of an oil spill on fishing rights, hunting rights, or environmental justice" as particularly deficient, and he ordered it to prepare

³⁴ Myron Dewey and Josh Fox. *Awake, a Dream from Standing Rock*. Documentary, 2017. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt6691862/>.

³⁵ As of the date of writing there are at least 1200 *reported* cases of murdered women and girls. Added to this, Indigenous women are seven times more likely to die of violence than are their non-Indigenous counterparts in the US or Canada.

a new report on its risks.³⁶ While the ruling may set precedents concerning environmental justice, there is no indication that issuing a directive for a new impact study will alter the outcome of the case. The judge's emphasis on the failure of the Army Corps to reach an acceptable legal level of *consideration* in their impact study is important; it demonstrates the broader nature of the legal fight. An attorney for the nonprofit environmental law organization Earthjustice says that the decision should be taken as a positive outcome, but also recognizes that in actuality the 'case is not about how the pipeline may harm Standing Rock, but whether the Corps adequately studied and reported on those harms before approving it in the first place.'³⁷ Even Boasberg's second complaint, concerning federal regulations mandating environmental justice studies on any constructions with proximity to poor or Indigenous communities, was based largely methodological grounds. As has been discussed earlier, it is unlikely that any outcome in favor of Standing Rock would have been rendered had the grounds for juridical consideration been foreclosed to Federal Indian Law, law that pertains solely to Indigenous rights.

While the issue is not new, it demonstrates a great deal about the complexities of US acknowledgement of Indigenous sovereignty and the limited or reluctant vision of the courts regarding this issue. Moving fluidly between notions of exclusive, preemptive and unlimited/absolute powers of Federal Indian Law, Indigenous nations are placed at an extreme disadvantage due to the inconsistency in the definitional legal standards being applied in any given case. While all tribes have been subject to changing interpretations and applications of Federal Indian Law, this is the only juridical space where legal arbiters return to original documents to re-form opinions of the court, instead of using precedents set in more recent cases, as in all other areas of law. For this reason, the status of Indigenous nations is continually interrupted by various government agencies, their historic relationship to the US government, and the immediate desires of corporate entities and the states. Most positive legal gains from Standing Rock stem from legal decisions based on law external to Federal Indian Law and outside of any consideration of our sovereign rights.

Acknowledgement that oil now flows under Mníšoše speaks to a deep pain that is affirmation of the continuing harm done to this river—our relative. Some of the Water Protectors have moved on to support the resistance in other sacred places on other Indigenous lands. Some have gone back to their reservation to help heal the physical and psychological damage done. Some remain in jail and hundreds await their court dates. But all sacrificed an enormous amount to stand for the sacred at Standing Rock. Despite these heart-wrenching realities, we have become stronger. We did come together in a historically unprecedented way and we were able to slow the completion of the pipeline in the face of a state-waged full military response. There can be no doubt that resistance to the Keystone XL, Trans Pecos, Comanche Trail, Sabal Trail Transmission and the Pilgrim/Aim pipelines will bring more of the same.³⁸ More importantly, we have learned how to organize and how to use social media to our advantage. Never has our voice been more central in the public consciousness. At the base of all of it we have developed a grassroots methodology that can be implemented in all future defenses of our land, culture, knowledge and sacred sites.

³⁶ Robinson Meyer. "The Standing Rock Sioux Claim "Victory and Vindication" in Court". *The Atlantic*. 14 June 2017. <https://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2017/06/dakota-access-standing-rock-sioux-victory-court/530427/>.

³⁷ Meyer.

³⁸ These proposed pipeline sites are found in tribal homelands. Two, the Trans Pecos Pipeline and the Comanche Trail Pipeline, are slated to be built by a coalition led by Energy Transfer Partners.

What We Have Learned

At the camps, a common refrain was, *now I understand*. The reference was used when speaking about state- and corporate-sponsored violence, sometimes when discussing legal frames, or when talking about ceded and unceded territories, ceremony, sacred places, good relations with our relatives and the benefit of non-violent direct action, to name a few contexts. While the conversations spoke of the singular, the scope of the statement alluded to a much larger, intuitive coalescing. In our youth and young adulthood, we are taught many things about what it is to be Indigenous. Often these lessons are about the way Indigenous people do things. We are told this is how it is done, but in some cases, we are not taught why. In coming to Standing Rock, people learned in place from the People and through our stories. Connecting these stories to the lessons of our youth has provided the reasons for doing the things that we do. Even though the artificial spaces of reservations have little to offer, they are situated in place and in an ancient continuum of being. At Standing Rock, centered in Indigenous knowledges, ceremony was resistance. The physical and metaphysical recognition of this reality was palpable and healing.

In speaking about the trauma suffered by many protectors, we highlight an important discussion of Indigenous emotional reaction to their continuing existence as colonized entities. During the actions, the protectors focused on ceremony and meeting DAPL security and state police non-violently and with a good heart. However, success in this effort does not account for more latent feelings of Indigenous animosity/resentment based in the long history of colonial rule that has served to justify the supremacy of white values and the continued exploitation and domination of Indigenous peoples. This animosity is the effect of internalized colonization and therefore is a part of the historical traumas experienced by the colonized. Glen Coulthard suggests that in some situations 'Indigenous peoples' individual and collective expressions of anger and resentment can help prompt the very forms of self-affirmative praxis that generate rehabilitated Indigenous subjectivities and decolonized forms of life.³⁹ Considering the continued structural and physical violence that is a part of our everyday life and that interferes with our relationships with humans, other-than-humans and to the land, this anger should be seen as a justified response and not simply 'an incapacitating inability or unwillingness to get over the past.'⁴⁰ This cannot be the single point on which an activist or liberation praxis should be built, but through the disgorging of internalized subjectivities Indigenous peoples can redirect destructive cycles onto an externalized 'enemy' where it belongs.

More than this, the refusal accept this occupied state can 'revalue and affirm Indigenous cultural traditions and social practices that are systematically denigrated yet never fully destroyed in situations of colonial rule.'⁴¹ Understanding the history of systemic colonization, treaty violation, and the illegal juridical decisions upon which the United States has been formed, it is unlikely that the Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island will experience any significant stage of reconciliation with the United States. Despite this, movement toward decolonization and active participation in activist movements like #noDAPL can help facilitate resistance located within, not outside, Indigenous space. In this effort, we must understand that what constitutes traditional practices is fluid and in the re-creation of political and cultural practices that promote healthy and productive Indigenous lifeways, we must guard against essentializing our understanding of the traditional. Additionally, Leanne Simpson asserts

³⁹ Glen Sean Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*, Indigenous Americas; Variation: Indigenous Americas. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), pg. 109.

⁴⁰ Ibid. 109.

⁴¹ Frantz Fanon tr. Richard Philcox. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Grove Press, 2004. 31.

rightfully that we must turn away from assimilative reformism and decolonize 'on our own terms, without the sanction, permission, or engagement of the state, [or] western theory.'⁴²

Indigenous resistance has been a part of everyday life since Columbus and other Europeans invaded the Americas. The act of Indigenous survival in the face of colonial oppressions can be counted as one of the many facets of resistance as it thwarted the colonizers genocidal policies toward the annihilation of all Turtle Island peoples. The genealogy of resistance is continually evolving and is manifold in its vectors. The use of media for mainstream/global visibility, militancy, civil disobedience, direct action, non-violence and US jurisprudence have all been employed to effect change in policy making, in support of Indigenous sovereignty, and the protection of Indigenous rights guaranteed in treaties and the Constitution. Grassroots activist efforts can be traced from the American Indian Movement (AIM), that burst onto the mainstream scene in their nineteen-month occupation of Alcatraz Island, to the United Native American members who occupied Mount Rushmore in 1970. Activist groups continued with the Trail of Broken Treaties Caravan that culminated in the occupation of the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Washington, DC and the 1973 occupation of Wounded Knee, which brought global attention to the unsafe living conditions on the Pine Ridge Reservation. The contemporary resurgence of similar groups—like the National Coalition in Sports and Media Forms, the Transform Columbus Day Alliance, the Keystone XL Pipeline Protestors, the Dakota 38 Riders, Idle No More and the DAPL Water Protects—sought to combat the legion of issues faced by Indigenous and First Nation Peoples. Although these groups used diverse methods in their attempts to transform policy making into programs and organizations to serve Indigenous peoples, each was based in Indigenous spirituality and ceremony.

At the heart of the AIM movement is a belief in the connectedness of all Indigenous peoples. To this end, activists focused on inclusion of Urban Indigenous populations that had been displaced by government programs that forced them from reservation spaces. It is imperative that we continue to embrace our collective whole to empower youth and individuals in the project of rebuilding (our nations and the fight against the issues of focus). Certainly, the strength of inter- and intra-nation cohesion was evidenced at DAPL camps. Following AIM's example, media exposure is imperative for successful dissemination of Indigenous demands and the security of those involved in actions. The presence of social media allows this to occur on a world-wide stage. Because mainstream media reports of our activism are often negative within US borders, telegraphing untainted journalism beyond these spaces can create world-wide networks and pressure governmental response. This was certainly the case with #noDAPL media communications.

Recognizing the advantages of creating solid informational, organizational, Indigenous and ally networks is imperative to successful activism. It has become clear that maintaining fluidity in these networks is essential in guarding against governmental infiltration and subsequent bureaucratization which diminishes the cohesiveness and effectiveness of any activist movement. These perils were encountered by the American Indian Movement (AIM) in the late sixties and seventies. For this reason, activist networks must be able to form and disband quickly with the same strength of sustained efforts. We must also continue to fight against the colonial influences that erode productive leadership and familial cohesiveness in our communities. Until we successfully navigate these spaces, we must recognize that they will be a part of all movements as they have become a part of our daily reality. To this end, we must

⁴² Leanne Betasamosake Simpson. *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back: Stories of Nishnaabeg Re-Creation, Resurgence and a New Emergence*. Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring Pub., 2011. 17.

set in place mechanisms to minimize the adverse effects of colonialism on coordinated activist movements.

The reality is that the United States never thought that we would remain. For this reason, our voices have been silenced and the laws set in place for our protection are largely cosmetic. If the treaties made between sovereign nations had been upheld, if the law had supported our legal petitions to prevent the destruction of our sacred sites and cultural patrimony, if people meant more than corporations, and if hate had not been the response to our pleas, none of this would have occurred. As I recount the incidents of this movement and its aftermath, I am reminded of the words of Hinmatóowyalahṭq'it.⁴³ In 1876 he said, '... And if the voice of our people could have been heard, that act would never have been done. But alas, though they stood around, they could neither be seen nor heard. Their tears fell like drops of rain.'

As the continued US negation of Indigenous Nations and peoples occurs, so too does the degradation of the land. As we recognize the indelible link between our people, other-than-human beings and all places of our lands it is easy to understand that we share a similar future. We belong to the water and the land, not the other way around. We are not separate from spirit and life. We do not subscribe to the Western proclivity toward the notion of human supremacy. Logic and reason do not exist apart from the whole. They are based in accumulated knowledge and the experience of interaction with all beings and entities. The symbiotic compilation of each of these elements produces the wisdom to live well in this place. We must ask ourselves, what stories will be told about our present and future generations? Perhaps we should continue down a dual road, where we find resonance in ancestral refrains and seek a parallel wisdom in the activism of today's youth. Certainly, we have witnessed the power of their vision. The tobacco is down, prayers are up and, through continued healing, we are picking up our hearts as we continue to act in defense of our relatives.

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⁴³ Hinmatóowyalahṭq'it is Chief Joseph's (Nez Perce) indigenous name. This excerpt of his longer speech was delivered in 1876.

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